

# *Tools for Learning*

## **CHOOSING BOOKS FOR RECREATIONAL READING**

MILDRED L. BATCHELDER

WHICH BOOKS do children read for fun? First, those that are at hand, and, second, those that have been made inviting. Although oversimplified, these two factors—availability and stimulation—are most important in determining youngsters' reading experiences.

If there are to be enough books, there must be regular provision for books and magazines in the annual school budget. The amount necessary is an infinitesimal part of the total school budget. Two to three per cent of total school expenditures for library books and textbooks as well would make possible a tremendous improvement of the book supply in school libraries. From \$1.50 to \$2 per student per year for the library book budget will meet the needs of many schools with enrollments under 1,000. Even with the splendid advance in school library book collections in the past decade, there are still thousands of secondary schools in which they are very inadequate. In elementary schools only a beginning has been made toward

providing boys and girls with library books for adequate reading experiences.

The other essential half of the availability factor is the careful selection of books. Approximately 1,000 children's books are published annually. Of these, how can a school choose which are the "must-haves," the desirables, and the unsuitables? A part of the book budget each year must, of course, go to replacements of worn-out books. With the balance, what new books should be added?

Teachers and librarians must first know what there is from which to choose. They must go to the "show-windows" in which the books make their first appearance—to the attractive publishers' catalogues, the advertising sections of magazines like *Educational Leadership*, and the advertising and review sections of weekly book-review magazines. In these the new book members of many publishing families are proudly described, and readers responsible for school buying note the ones which appear to meet their needs.

Next, reviews of the books tentatively selected will be looked up in the literary and educational magazines and in the American Library Association semi-monthly *Booklist*. The reviews and the selected lists in which books are evaluated in terms of their use with young people compare the books with others which are similar and often comment

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*Mildred L. Batchelder is Chief of the School and Children's Library Division of the American Library Association. In this introduction to the November "Tools for Learning," Miss Batchelder discusses the importance of providing attractive, worthwhile recreational reading for children and young people in school libraries.*

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on their authoritativeness, their originality, style, format, and significance.

In communities where there are bookstores or other libraries, actual examination and, where possible, complete reading of the books are very desirable. These are joys of selection which only a limited few may have, for bookstores in which numbers of new children's books may be found are limited chiefly to cities. Lack of bookstores or other centers where all new children's books can be readily studied and compared is one of the serious handicaps in choosing children's books most effectively. The reading involved in selection, added to continuous reading of books in school book collections, serves as an indispensable basis for guiding children's reading. That guidance, cooperatively done by librarians and teachers who know children's books intimately, is the link between a well-selected book collection and the boys and girls.

The pupils should have a share in all stages of choice of books. Experience in studying advertisements and publishers' catalogues, followed by further investigation and examination of interesting titles, helps them to gain an informed, consumer approach to the selection of books, just as they are learning to make intelligent choices in other types of purchases.

The process of book selection here described is needed for any type of reading material. Are there special problems or patterns in choosing books for recreational reading?

Observation of the reading of a group of boys and girls over a week's period will prevent too narrow a definition of what constitutes recreational reading materials. What is fun for one boy may

be drudgery for another. What a girl uses to obtain background information on one day she may read for personal pleasure the following week.

Examination of the bookshelves in libraries and classrooms in many schools results in several conclusions about types of material which need strengthening to provide richer and more varied reading experiences. Frequently selection of current fiction, biography, poetry, and plays is too limited. Standard books may be well represented, but is there sufficient recent fiction? Are there enough of the attractive small books of individual poets and playwrights? Collections of both are necessary for reference but they are much less inviting for pleasure reading. Inclusion of many of the better books on the war is important. For most of these, the term of usefulness will be limited and those of temporary value will be discarded as interest changes.

Selection of new titles for less-able readers must constantly be kept in mind. Recreational reading materials must be chosen for all pupils with adequate consideration to the needs of the reader of limited ability and also of the superior and the average reader.

The importance of fresh new copies of books and of attractive editions of standard titles is recognized by some schools but not by others. Good titles standing on the shelves in drab and uninteresting editions may permanently deter young people from discovering some books.

To these few comments, a final aspect in the selection of books for pleasure reading should be added. Books selected for recreational reading must meet the criteria of good book selection. They must have integrity, authoritativeness,

right human relations, true sense of values, interest for children, a type of presentation suitable for their age audience. Humor, imagination, and real distinction of style are desirable. Format should be in keeping with the story. On the wise choice of recreational reading depends the quality of the reading experiences of boys and girls.



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